

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT**  
**TOWN SELECT BOARD**  
**SPECIAL MEETING**  
**Minutes of December 6, 2018**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair Kenneth W. Goslant, Board members Lynn Doney, Julie H. Goodrich, K. David Maxwell, and Nathaniel Miller. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Finance Director Laurie Baroffio, Police Chief John Helfant, John Stephens (Brown Public Library Board of Trustees), Sally Davidson (Recreation Committee), Tanya Crawford-Stempel, and Elroy C. Hill.

Chair Goslant called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled):**

- a. Tanya Crawford-Stempel: Better Connections Grant Program.** Ms. Crawford-Stempel has been a Northfield resident for over fourteen (14) years and she also works for the Vermont Department of Health. As part of her job, she forwards grant opportunities to communities, including Northfield. Ms. Crawford-Stempel believes the Better Connections Grant Program would be appropriate for Northfield as it is designed for Vermont communities looking to encourage local economic development through improvements to the physical environment such as enhancing recreational opportunities. Ms. Crawford-Stempel has met with representatives from the municipality, Norwich University (NU), the Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC), the Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN), etc. and they already have shown enthusiasm for taking part in this program. She noted this grant has a ten percent (10%) local match amount that is capped at \$7,000. These funds could be obtained from sources other than the municipality including fundraising, NU donations, etc. This would be a planning and mapping grant that could be used to explore several possible projects, such as expanding the existing trail system to link Memorial Park and Northfield Falls Park; making use of the recently-purchased parcel at the summit of Paine Mountain to expand the Town's forest trail system; creating improved off-road paths so Northfield residents can easier walk to local stores, etc. If the grant application is successful, the feasibility of these and other possible proposals (including total costs) could be determined. Once this information is on hand, the municipality would be able to apply for other grants that would fund construction costs, obtaining trail rights-of-way, etc.

Chair Goslant felt having the municipality apply for these types of grants would demonstrate to the State of Vermont the level of Northfield's commitment to expanding its recreational opportunities. He felt the Water Street Park with its natural trail system is an existing proof of this. Manager Schulz asked about the deadline to submit this grant application and how much money should the municipality request. Ms. Crawford-Stempel said the application deadline is January 31, 2019, and additional local meetings will be held in coming weeks to determine the optimal grant amount request. She felt this information should be available by early January 2019. Board member Maxwell feels this is a good idea but is concerned the planning and mapping study developed could become like the final report developed by the Vermont Downtown Action Team (V-DAT): widely admired but not implemented. He asked if Ms. Crawford-Stempel could provide any cost estimates for the various proposals discussed earlier. Ms. Crawford-Stempel said this was outside her area of expertise but the planning and mapping study would provide this and other information.

Chair Goslant believes Dan Currier from the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) could be very helpful with the grant application as he has worked with the municipality on many similar local projects and he knows this community very well as a result. He then thanked Ms. Crawford-Stempel for bringing this proposal to the Select Board and for all her good work on it to date. This matter will be discussed further at next Tuesday night's regular meeting (12/11/18). It has been suggested the existing economic development fund could be used to pay the match amount. The current balance is over \$100,000.

### **III. BUDGET WORK SESSION**

- a. **Northfield Police Department (NPD).** NPD Chief John Helfant began his budget presentation by discussing the state of the NPD since he took over seven (7) weeks ago. He said one of the full-time officers would be attending the Vermont Police Academy in February 2019 should he pass the physical testing component of the entrance examination. He also will be sending one of the part-time officers as a backup in case the full-time officer fails the physical test. Chief Helfant then noted the dispatch clerk position is now vacant but he has part-time employees filling in until a permanent replacement is hired. The deadline for job applications is Tuesday, December 18, 2018, and four (4) applications already have been received.

Chief Helfant said he is fairly comfortable with the FY 2019/2020 NPD budget developed by management. The only issue he has is with the amount budgeted for overtime since he felt it was difficult to keep these expenses under control under the provisions of the current NPD union contract. This contract will expire June 30, 2019, and negotiations are ongoing regarding a new contract. Chief Helfant noted that for FY 2017/2018, which is the most recent completed fiscal year, NPD overtime was budgeted at \$20,000 but the actual amount spent was over \$50,000. It was felt some of this overage could be attributed to department understaffing for most of this fiscal year. Chief Helfant has suggestions for the new contract under negotiation that he felt could dramatically reduce future overtime costs. He will forward this information to Manager Schulz.

Chief Helfant then discussed the current NPD fleet, which now has four (4) vehicles in service. (The NPD currently does hold title on a fifth vehicle, a 2010 Dodge Challenger, but that vehicle is inactive and will be disposed of in the near future.) The oldest one is an unmarked 2012 Ford Explorer with over 103,000 and a serious rust problem that Chief Helfant himself is driving. The 2014 Ford Explorer has 66,000 miles and is scheduled for replacement within two (2) years. Chief Helfant said the 2017 Ford Explorer has 22,000 miles and is in great shape. The newest vehicle, the 2018 Ford Explorer, has had its graphics and striping completed but some internal equipment still needs to be installed. Finance Director Laurie Baroffio noted the 2018 Ford Explorer is intended to replace the 2012 vehicle, which is being retained as an extra vehicle even though it is missing a proper gun rack and cannot be used for prisoner transport. Chief Helfant said the 2017 and 2018 Ford Explorers currently don't have mobile data computers installed because both vehicles lack proper mounting stands. He said his department already has suitable computers on hand but the stands, which cost about \$1,400 each, still have to be purchased. He added having the mobile data computers in the vehicles allows for much better communication with the officer in the field. Manager Schulz said the cost of the new stands is covered in the FY 2019/2020 NPD Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) budget. Chief Helfant said he would start looking locally for used and/or inexpensive computers stands appropriate for a Ford Explorer. He added grant funds for this purchase might be available through the Vermont Governor's Highway Safety Program.

Chief Helfant also would like to update the computer file storage system at the Police Station as all the department's data is now stored on one hard drive. This should cost about \$650. Manager Schulz believes these funds are available in the current fiscal year budget and this purchase should be made as soon as possible.

A discussion then followed regarding the possible purchase of Tasers for the department. Chief Helfant said the Tasers and the associated body cameras are linked to individual police officers for proper record-keeping purposes and cannot be shared by two or more officers. He added the cost of each Taser is about \$1,800 so it would cost about \$12,000 to equip all seven (7) full-time NPD officers (including himself). The body cameras, which start recording as soon as the Taser is activated, cost about \$900 each for a total of \$6,300 for all seven (7) officers. The new body cameras would replace the outdated ones now in service.

Board member Miller asked why the NPD now should be equipped with Tasers. Chief Helfant stated they were a good alternative to pulling a firearm on a combative subject who might be wielding a 2x4, club, or other non-edged weapon. He added a tased subject is incapacitated for a minimum of five (5) seconds and Tasers are best employed by two (2) officers working in tandem with one operating the Taser and the other standing by to use a sidearm if needed.

Chief Helfant said even though Taser use is promoted as a non-lethal response in a confrontation, they can cause fatalities if used improperly or on individuals with preexisting health issues. He added the same could be said for using pepper spray or wielding a baton in a similar situation. Chief Helfant said the State of Vermont now has strict rules regarding when and on whom a Taser can be deployed. He added Tasers also can be used on vicious dogs as an alternative to shooting them.

Chair Goslant asked if it was necessary to purchase all seven (7) Tasers and body cameras at the same time. Chief Helfant said it was possible to start with two (2) of each and equip only the day and night shift patrol supervisors. The program then could be expanded to the other officers. Manager Schulz said a CEP account has been set up to finance Taser and body camera purchases over the next few years. Chair Goslant said he had opposed equipping the NPD with Tasers in the past but had changed his mind due to the current opioid crisis and accompanying violence. He prefers starting by equipping two (2) officers first. Board member Maxwell also favors buying the equipment but would like it done in a fiscally prudent manner over time. Board member Doney believes it would be wrong to compromise NPD officer safety by trying to economize this expense. He would like all seven (7) officers equipped as soon as possible and believes the money can be found without too much difficulty. Chief Helfant said some Taser manufacturers do have installment programs so payments could be spread out.

Board member Doney asked if the NPD officers would need to attend the Vermont Police Academy for Taser training. Chief Helfant said there are Taser instructors who could come to Northfield for in-house training. Another possibility is to have one NPD officer trained as a certified Taser instructor who then would train the rest of the department. Board member Miller suggested a possible compromise by starting with the purchase of four (4) Tasers and body cameras. Chief Helfant said that would be the Select Board's decision. In the interim, he will look into the available financing programs.

- b. Brown Public Library (BPL).** John Stevens serves as Treasurer on the BPL Board of Trustees. He noted the total operating budget requested by the BPL Board is \$106,500, which is \$500 more than last year. He said the BPL has had a cash flow problem in recent months that has required transferring some funds from its endowment. This is normal practice over the winter months and these funds will be restored when grant monies and donations start arriving in the spring.

Mr. Stevens said the major BPL expense this past year was a project to remove standing water in the basement with a sump pump, which cost about \$2,800. A minor expense was the purchase of a new photocopier that will be less expensive to operate than the old one. In addition, Mr. Stevens hopes to reduce BPL insurance costs by taking part in the municipality's insurance coverage from VLCT PACIF. Chair Goslant noted the amount BPL expects to achieve from its "Annual Appeal" fundraiser is about \$4,000 less than what was collected a couple years ago. It was noted one of the BPL's major benefactors for several years (Barry T. Chouinard) has passed away since then. Board member Maxwell asked if the BPL building was in good shape. Mr. Stevens said there are some minor repairs that need to be made but overall it is in good condition. Manager Schulz noted there is a CIP account for BPL roof replacement and asked Mr. Stevens if he could predict when this might become necessary. Mr. Stevens couldn't make an informed guess but said after some repair work the roof now seems to be in good condition. The Select Board members then thanked Mr. Stevens for the information provided tonight.

**c. Administration (Manager, Town Clerk/Treasurer, etc.)**

**Manager.** Manager Schulz said this budget hadn't changed much except for a three percent (3%) increase in personnel costs to cover scheduled wage and benefit rises. He noted there would be about \$30,000 in total savings in employer insurance costs, including workers compensation, due to lower VLCT PACIF rates. Ms. Baroffio noted these savings would be spread over several departments.

**Town Clerk/Treasurer.** Manager Schulz said this department also would see a three percent (3%) increase in wages and benefits. Board member Maxwell asked about the status of the vault. Manager Schulz said there was a \$20,000 balance in the CIP account for the vault and Town Clerk/Treasurer Kim Pedley feels the current space should be sufficient for at least another four (4) years. There has been some discussion of reorganizing the vault by adding new shelving, etc. Ms. Baroffio noted a major reorganization done a couple years ago was responsible for the extra years of storage indicated above.

**Board of Civil Authority.** Manager Schulz said the only change in this department's budget is the amount in the "Voting Machine" line item was decreased twenty percent (20%) from \$2,500 to \$2,000 to reflect the fact there are no federal or state elections scheduled for November 2019.

**Accounting.** Ms. Baroffio said there were a couple changes in this budget for the coming fiscal year. There is three percent (3%) increase in employee wages and benefits. This increase has been factored into the proposed FY 2019/2020 budget even though the new union contract that would take effect at the beginning of the next fiscal year has yet to be negotiated or approved. In addition, the amount budgeted for overtime has been increased from \$1,050 to \$4,000 to properly reflect the extra hours her employees put in when time-sensitive tasks, such as payroll processing, have to be completed by a certain date. This usually happens when the department is understaffed due to illness, vacation, etc. Ms. Baroffio felt this was a more cost effective approach than outsourcing this work.

**IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled).** There was none.

**V. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Board member Miller, seconded by Board member Maxwell, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the regular Select Board meeting of January 8, 2019.